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SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER TUMANYAN TO FORM A
POLITICAL PARTY?

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accordingly.

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) As local politicians begin to gear up for the 2007-2008 elections in Armenia, the rumor that President Robert Kocharian's Chief of Staff, Artashes Tumanyan, may enter national politics with his own party, is still big news. Tumanyan has been in politics since 1990 and has been promoted to various high-level posts throughout his career. He has kept a relatively low profile over the past few years while operating within the GOAM. His reputation and access to key players in the political structure indicate, however, that a party launched by Tumanyan could become a strong one. Tumanyan appears to have President Kocharian's support and a strong popular base in the northern Lori region of Armenia. End Summary.

WILL TUMANYAN FORM A NEW PARTY?

2. (SBU) In mid-September, local newspapers carried stories suggesting that the President's Chief of Staff, Artashes Tumanyan, was planning to form a new political party. Aravot, an opposition daily, claimed the party was being formed at President Kocharian's request, who hoped to use it to ensure that a majority of his allies would be well positioned in the next parliament. In a subsequent press conference, the President's Spokesman, Viktor Soghomonyan, confirmed the rumors of the party's establishment, but denied the President had any role in it. Viktor Dallakyan, an opposition MP who shares Tumanyan's Lori region base of support, said that Tumanyan had discussed the idea of a party under Tumanyan's leadership with him. According to the Ministry of Justice, however, Tumanyan has not yet registered his party; Tumanyan himself has not yet commented publicly on the proposed party.

TUMANYAN'S BID HAS BIG POTENTIAL

3. (SBU) Amid constant rumors in recent months about creation of new political parties (a party consisting of the major oligarchs, a party backed by former "Defense Minister" of Nagorno Karabagh, etc.) a bid by Artashes Tumanyan stands out. Tumanyan, unlike these other leaders, has maintained a low public profile and insulated himself from political mud-slinging. At the same time, he has managed to operate effectively across party lines and, unlike other political actors in Armenia, he does not have major enemies in the previous administration. This, coupled with his apparent pragmatism, suggests to some that he could potentially be a strong political leader.

COMMENT: POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS, RE-ALIGNMENTS

4. (SBU) The upcoming 2008 presidential elections promise big changes, as this is President Kocharian's last term in office. We expect intense competition during the 2007 Parliamentary elections as well, due to the changes in the Electoral Code, which reduced the number of single-mandate seats in the parliament from 56 to 41. In addition, the changes in the Law on Political Parties have significantly increased the number of members necessary to register a party, and we expect this to lead to the consolidation and realignment of political groups as well.

BIO NOTES

15. (SBU) Artashes Tumanyan was born November 16, 1949 in the Noyemberyan region (the northern-most region of Armenia) to a family of civil servants. He graduated from the Department of Technical Cybernetics of the Yerevan State Polytechnic Institute in 1971 and later earned his doctorate. Before entering political life in 1990, he worked in Vanadzor first as lecturer and then in construction. From 1990 to 1995 he was in the Armenian Parliament, where from 1992 to 1995 he served as the second Deputy Speaker. In 1995 he was elected to a second term. In 1997 he relinquished his seat in Parliament to lead the Armenian Tax Service, where he served until 1998. From 1999 to 2000 he was a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. From 2000 to the present he has worked as the President's Chief of Staff.

GODFREY